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18322

Distr.  
LIMITED

ID/WG.498/10(SPEC.)  
4 January 1990

**United Nations Industrial Development Organization**

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Interregional Symposium on the Role  
of the Industrial Co-operative Movement in  
Economic and Industrial Development

Moscow, USSR, 11-15 June 1990

**COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITY  
OF THE COMMUNICATOR\***

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4/11

\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Secretariat of UNIDO. This document has not been formally edited.

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The second half of the 1980s is considered to be a period of search for new ways of further social and economic development. The social policy of CPSU of the seventies and even of early eighties pursued the goals of complete social and economic homogeneity, confluence of nations and the preservation of political unanimity. The situation has been changed since 1985. The New Thinking has been expressed in searching for the pluralistic forms in economic, social and political spheres.

The idea of co-operative movement might be regarded as one of the main agents of positive changes both in the economy and in social life. Today one can observe some real shifts in those spheres, although there are a number of cases where co-operatives still bear some features characteristic of former times, i.e. lines of command, complex administrative systems and stagnation.

To bring about social change, it is not enough to regard some kind of innovation as acceptable. Here mass communication plays its part together with other factors promoting or inhibiting change. A character of representation of co-operative movement may in a certain way influence the co-operatives themselves and their extension.

A special feature of mass information processes in the system of social communication should be mentioned, where its formal part is completely dominated by a certain agent of socio-political guidance. Under such conditions, a position expressed in mass media might be simply understood as a position of the main communicator. That is, the character of representation is marked by the attitude of the agent of social change to the subject of communication.

In general, formal means of communication tend to reinforce the status quo; but in certain cases, when mass media express the social communicator's attitude to the subject of communication showing the initiative for change, it may produce change rather than reinforcement. Mass media may even affect some social forces resisting change and render them inactive.

In order to understand the communicator's informational behaviour some general aspects of the problem have to be pointed out. That is the universal connection of phenomena, the interrelation of economic, political and social mechanisms of a society. Changes in economy are inconceivable without corresponding or concomitant changes in political and social systems. This means that mass media, promoting change in the economical sphere, promote also changes in the political and social spheres. In that context, the term "social" needs to be defined. Usually "social" is closely connected with "economical" and "socio-economical" and leads us to class relationships among social groups (relations of property). Apparently, economic innovations may bring along somewhat more differentiated socio-economic relations between social groups than exist today and such differentiations may be observed already. But what is meant here, along with the broader understanding of the term "social", are the actual socio-cultural and ethnic differences among large social groups. "National" in connection with the term "social" is not being considered here, because socio-cultural and ethnic relations have already been activated by economic innovations. Positive social changes in the sphere of economy, the decentralization of economic and political life, lead to the reconsideration of established international, inter-ethnic and inter-group relations. Some social groups in certain ethnic units may lose opportune positions under the pressure of democratization. Other, potentially more independent national units, may require similar changes in the sphere of national relations. That is, means of communication promoting change in the economy, promote transformations in the sphere of politics and may excite strong movements in the sphere of national relations. Consideration of mass media content in interrelations of economic, political and social spheres may prove to be helpful in understanding the informational attitude of the communicator towards the co-operative movement.

Studying the problem of communicative activity of the agent of social guidance, the term "co-operative" also needs to be defined. Here we may have three different interpretations of the term. First, "co-operative" can be used to denote collective farms (kolkhozes), but we may not consider them as socio-economic innovations of the epoch of perestroika although we may talk about reconstructing

kolkhozes on that new foundation. Secondly, we have the consumers' co-operative "Centrosojuz" in the Soviet reality, which cannot be considered as an innovation of eighties. Nevertheless, one should not forget that there exists co-operation of a new type within the system of consumers' co-operation "Centrosojuz", which is formed according the principles of eighties. And, finally, we have co-operatives, which sprang up in the second half of eighties almost in all fields of the economy and which, in their essence, should be free of the shortcomings of the kolkhozes and consumers' unions deformed for ideological and political purposes.

The research of mass media content reported here, focused on the third type of co-operatives. "Kommunisti", a Georgian communist party central committee organ was chosen as a source item for the research. That choice would offer the possibility to trace back the co-operative policy in one of the republics; at the same time the policy observed in the above-mentioned newspaper may be regarded as a regional (peripheral, non-central) co-operative policy of the major communicator, since the republican CP is a regional party organization of CPSU.

The press items were analyzed in a systematic way. A set of variables, such as a year, a quarter, the date of item issue, gave a formal classification of the press items. The articles were further classified according to the author's type and genre; the volume of attention to the problem of co-operation was defined.

Qualitative indicators were used to form two subgroups: the description of different aspects of co-operations and a socio-political estimation of the co-operative movement. The qualitative part of the classification instrument resulted in finding nine aspects of co-operative movement.

For the presentation of the empirical findings a distribution of attention varying in time and according to the type of author and kind of information was chosen. For the presentation of qualitative characteristics a distribution of attention to different aspects of co-operation was chosen. The research encompassed the period from January 1988 to August 1989. Press items were divided into three parts - issued before the publication of the bill on co-operations (March 1988); issued during the period from the publication of the bill until the publication of the act on co-operations (June 1988); issued after the publication of the act. An attention to the elements of the classifying instrument served as a unit of analysis.

For the period of observation 45 articles dedicated to the problem of co-operation were identified, with only 622 units of attention. It is obvious that such an amount of attention to co-operation over a period of 20 months cannot be regarded as great. It is, however, interesting to follow the dynamics of attention. A somewhat bigger attention occurred in March and May 1988 - 3.84 and 5.56 units of attention per issue of "Kommunisti". For the remaining of 1988 and 1989 the average amount of attention per issue never exceeded one unit. The second minor increase of attention occurred in the second quarter of 1989 (May 1989 - 1.8 units of attention per issue). Thus, a somewhat significant attention to co-operation can be observed from the moment of the publication of the bill to the moment of the publication of the act, i.e. during three months. The second less significant increase may be explained as follows: first, it happened during the period of discussing co-operative taxation; secondly, the increase coincides in time with the informational breakthrough in the Georgian republican media, caused by the Tbilisi April events, when the former regulative barriers of the informational channels were overcome. The relative amount of attention to co-operation also indicates the absence of proper attention. For the period of the most complacent attitude towards the co-operative movement, the second quarter of 1988, the relative attention equaled 2.1 % of the whole theoretical attention of the newspaper. For the following periods the relative attention to co-operations never exceeded 1%.

The distribution of attention to co-operations according to the type of author shows that the overwhelming majority of information about co-operations originates from official messages of TASS and the Georgian Information Agency. Articles by economists and legal authors are the most rare. The messages about co-operations mostly belonged to the factual/informative kind; rarely the messages represented the analytical type.

During the period of increased informational activity of the communicator, a greater amount of attention was paid to the aspects of the co-operative movement, such as the functioning of co-operatives, their spheres of activity, support from the local authorities. Among the spheres of co-operatives' activities, services, trade and public catering were the most often present. Among the questions concerning the functioning of co-operatives, somewhat greater attention was paid to their relations with state organizations.

The period after the publication of the act on co-operations is characterized by a decrease in the communicator's informational activity. Some socio-political estimations indicate the presence of problems in the development of the co-operative movement. Assessments of the co-operative movement expressed in the analyzed articles indicate that the movement is expected to improve the economic situation. Thus, positive assessments exist in the former stages of the analyzed period. Some anticipations expressed in the third stage point out the possibility of strengthening the obsolete economic situation under the conditions of the new movement for co-operation.

Thus, we have a specific type of representation of the problem by the mass media at our disposal. The character of the representation is characterized by the specific attitude of the communicator to the subject of communication. We may conclude that the representation of the co-operation problem in the analyzed press items helps to maintain the present situation, or to form the "new" co-operation according to old patterns, rather than to promote some positive changes in that field. It should also be noted that the type of representation which reinforces the status quo in the economic sphere is not conducive to promote a restructuring in the political and social spheres. On the other hand, there is an increasing necessity for positive social changes - democratization of the society, concession of economic, political and social rights which is the reality of our days. Therefore, a social issue is raised for the communicator to reorientate mass media for the purposes of social change.